

# ADAM'S HOUSE IN PARADISE

Lower East Side, New York City

## STOREFRONT

Art and Architecture

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The Garden of Eden


behind 184 Eldridge Street

To Amir Neshat and his future

Published, Edited, and Designed by  
Kyong Park, Glenn Weiss

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otherwise.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a town of square pegs, there is a round clearing named The Garden of Eden, peace amid deceased urbanism called the Lower East Side of New York City. For the last ten years, above abandoned city-owned property, Adam Purple, a visionary gardener, single-handedly created a public garden under the shadow of our built environment. Radiating from its central element, "double yin and yang", this symbol of soil reclamation continued to expand as surrounding buildings were gradually demolished.

Before it enters the next dormant winter season, The Garden of Eden may be uprooted and never bloom in spring again. A public housing project will be constructed on the site of the garden. This project for low and moderate income families by N.Y.C Housing Authority, federally funded by H.U.D., is scheduled to be constructed over The Garden of Eden.

The STOREFRONT recognizes the mutual importance of the garden and the housing. A co-existence of the garden with the proposed housing project is a realistic and practical way to improve the quality of life for those who will occupy this site (there is open space available in the present H.A. project). Adam's House in Paradise is an exhibition presenting alternative designs to preserve the garden within the housing project, and to envision future environments that improve basic urban shelter through accompaniment with nature. How the architectural profession and the public in general will respond to The Garden of Eden is the basic interest of STOREFRONT.

STOREFRONT

Kyong Park  
Glenn Weiss  
September, 1984

Essays by

Adam Purple

Bruce McM. Wright, J.

Olive Bridget Brown

Patricia C. Phillips

Lucy R. Lippard

Richard Plunz

Frederick Ted Castle



Exhibiting Architects

Walczak/Standing

Ron Steiner

Pat Sapinsley

Purple/Pavlova/Saunders

Kyong Park

Morphosis

Imre Makovecz

Uttan Jain

Furniture Club

Neil Denari

Bausman/Gill

BA BA ARC (Balch/Baratloo)

Lebbeus Woods

Shin Takamatsu

Alison Smithson

Bart Prince

Mary Pepchinski

Eric Owen Moss

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Bill Lane

Zvi Hecker

David Devaleria

Dan Coma

Anderson/Wheelwright



The "garden" has been many things in the historical evolution of housing in New York. Most fundamentally, these sensibilities can be distinguished according to social class. A classic contrast much cited in the late 19th Century was between the mansion of multi-millionaire A.T. Stewart and the slum housing at "Five Points." Stewart's marble palace was sited on six city lots at Fifth Avenue and 39th Street, with an appreciable private garden. By contrast, Five Points, was long characterized as the poverty-level housing of the period, it had not a modicum of light or "nature," in this context, consisting of sufficient oxygen and the hygienic blessing of a sunlight "bath".

For middle to upper incomes, the palace and the garden in housing changed over time but never overlapped with the sensibility of the poor. For example, for the second half of the 19th century the ideal of a private urban garden diminished for the wealthy as density rose in Manhattan. For some people, the elaborate apartment building was embraced as an alternative cultural norm, complemented by a country house for summer escape and requisite contact with green nature. Wealthy neighborhoods had their parks and the most luxurious buildings, such as the Apthorp, integrated formal gardens with courtyards, more to be appreciated as urban relief than to be touched.

In the 19th-century world of New York's poor the issue of the "garden" was perceived literally as one of life and death. In the "pure-penicillin age," nature in housing was the prevailing medical antidote to disease, even if only in terms of obtaining "light and air" in every room, a goal never fully achieved in New York to this day. The progression of attempt at legislative control of speculative housing for the poor (tenements) between 1867 and 1901 trace the gradual eking out of a minimum exposure to light and air.

For non-speculative philanthropic housing, for which profits were restricted, the incorporation of nature as a real garden appeared from early on, the most impressive examples being among the earliest Alfred Treadway White projects in Brooklyn, built between 1877 and 1890. In these examples, unlike upper class projects, the garden is designed to be actively used, with drying racks for laundry, and gazebos for play and concerts. Around the same time, the notion of public provision of parks in slum neighborhoods, was advanced through reform efforts. An early example was Columbus Park on Mulberry Bend adjacent to "Five Points" a slum clearance encouraged by Jacob Riis and completed in 1896. The park replaced one of the most unhygienic blocks in Manhattan.

With the New Deal, philanthropy shifted from private to public. The incorporation of literal nature with housing for the poor was an integral aspect of design ideology, even as the medical imperatives declined. Naturalism in housing moved from the "garden" to "park." The two earliest large-scale public housing projects in New York City bear witness to this progression. The first, Harlem River Houses, was a hard urban project, with its paved courtyards, discrete gardens, and

If The Garden of Eden is anything more than a unique inner-urban Earthwork (environmental/landscape architecture in the spirit of the Spiral Jetty by the late Robert Smithson), it may be classified reasonably as an exercise in human (I prefer the non-sexist/-dualistic term "huwomanimal") rights under Articles 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 14 of the Constitution of the United States of America (I prefer "Omerica"), under Article 18 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, under Paragraphs 1 (a & c), 2, and 3 of Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and under Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which Declaration and Covenant comprise "The International Bill of Human Rights").

The Article of the U.N. Declaration states (slightly edited to avoid the sexist usage in vogue in 1948): "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change ....religion and belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest (one's) religion in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The religion implicit in the "here-and -now" creation of The Garden is a blend of Taoism and Zen Buddhism.

Article 15 of the Convent cited above states: "1. The State Parties...recognize the right of everyone; (a) to take part in cultural life.... (c) To benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which (one) is the author;" "2. The steps taken by the State Parties....to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture;" "3. The States Parties... undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity."

Article 18 and 19 of the Convent cited above state: "18-1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of (one's) choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest (one's) religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. "2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair....freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of (one's) choice.... 19-1.

Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference." "2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of (one's) choice."

The plan of the City of New York to vandalize The Garden of Eden on

whatever pretext constitutes a flagrant assault on and violation of the rights just cited and the "unalienable rights" of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" of the Declaration of Independence: those persons laboring in The Garden since 1975 have a natural right to dignify their City-abandoned environment, to make topsoil (including "night soil") for growing food and flowers, and to produce oxygen.

The Balinese have no word for "art" or "artist"; creativity is seen as a natural means of honoring the gods and serving the community.

"The task of the Enlightened is to restore, with the tools of creativity, what the Hateful have destroyed with their weapons of oppression." -- Wall graffiti seen at Delancey and Allen Streets in New York City's Lower East Side.

It is said that it takes Mother Nature 500 years to create one inch of topsoil; on that basis, The Garden of Eden represents 2,000 to 3,000 years of evolution -- and that's lot of r(apid)evolution for City officials and bureaucrats to ignore, to misrepresent repeatedly, and to attempt to destroy through consistent denial of "due process" of law!

Sociologically-psychologically, The Garden, as "a workshop in human rights" (Stern magazine, Hamburg, West Germany, December 6, 1979. p.214), addresses the Problem of huwomanimal alienation from the Earth (a symptom of self-alienation or alienation from one's own mind-body), which alienation produces a negative cornucopia of pathological behavior; urban crimes, mental illness, etc.

A visitor to The Garden observed that English is the only language that uses "soiled" and "dirty" as terms of disparagement. Since the World came into existence, topsoil (dirt) has been formed by the natural process of the decaying of dead plant and animal bodies and shit. As D.H. Lawrence observed, there is nothing inherently wrong about the word or the reality of shit (see Pansies) -- the "wrongness" exists only inside people's heads and not outside in the real environment.

How well I remember being told in the first grade in semi-rural Missouri by "Teacher" Pauline Bachman to wash out my mouth with soap for having said the word "shit"! I also remember thinking, "Wow, there is something really weird about this 'educational' system; I'd better keep my third eye on it." I have wondered since then (1936) if Ms. Bachman ever "washed out" her cerebral circuits! I guess I should give her an autographed (by rev. les ego) copy of Zentence! (see final paragraph below) for that purpose (if she still is -- or ever was --alive).

"people having 'intuitive insights'...can learn and bring back useful information about the goings-on in the 'universal mind.'" wrote Itzhak



Bentov on page 112 of Stalking the Wild Pendulum --On the Mechanics of Consciousness (E.P Dutton, New York, 1977). On the next page he says, "Any serious event can be known across the universe instantly by consciousnesses whose interest or business it is to know these things."

"Consciousness," according to the 1975 edition of The New Columbia Encyclopedia, means "in psychology, a term commonly used to indicate a state of being aware of the environment."

One's environment is continuously and simultaneously "inside-the-skin" and "outside-the-skin" in the phraseology of General Semantics (Alfred Korzybski). Any perceived or conceptualized duality is purely a mental aberration, such as the "false-to-fact" Aristotelian concepts of "straight," "rest," "permanence," "security," etc. There are no "straight" lines "inside-the-skin," nor any physiological "software" there to detect them. Ictinus, in designing the Parthenon in Athens, bowed the "horizontal" lines upward at the ends to make them look "straight."

"The problem, from Adam's point of view," wrote Norman Green in the "The Purple People" (New York Magazine, 27 Aug. 1979, pp.63-72), "is our civilization's gross incontinence. We're fouling ourselves. He calls the leaders of government 'ignoranusus.' Ignorance of the anus is a grand metaphor for the cavalier poisoning of the air, earth, and water with smoke and aerosols, radioactive refuse, deadly chemicals, and sewage."

"So Adam renounced the flush toilet 'because it's counterrevolutionary to pollute the oceans.' Each week he digs a hole a foot wide and a foot deep (to keep the Sabbath wholly hol(e)y!) and fills it with....sifted sand, vegetable scraps, weed prunings, and Purple excrement. The Chinese have used this method of topsoil production for millenia; they call it making night soil. Another of Adam's favorite quotes is from Teng (pronounced 'dung') Tsu-Hui, agricultural official of the People's Republic of China; 'I consider every person to be a small-scale fertilizer factory.'"

Aristotle, who lived before the Romans invented sewers and built them with slave labor, called earthworms "the intestines of the earth."

"There are minimum technology alternatives to flush toilet plumbing," wrote Bell Day (pseudonym of Editor Anne M. Reiss) in "R(apid)evolution Begins at Home-Where You'd Least Expect It" (Inner City Light, New York, July-Sept. 1979,p.9). What is needed is a complete reversal in the thought processes of most overurbanized civilized individuals. Shame and disgust of body fuctions will have to be discarded by the Ugly Americans who can L.E.A.R.N. (Lets Erase And Reprogram Now for speciesurvival by 1984) to take direct, plumbingless responsibility for their shit...."

Adam, she summarized is a man with a keen political awareness and a razor-edged 'zense' of humor. I sense in him the Orientalernal patience of an agr(apid)evolutionary who has for years tried to reveal a profoundly simple truth only to be rebuffed and scorned time and time again."

"In view of the cesspool which Occidentals glory in making of this hemisphere, perhaps it is time his critics stopped laughing and started l.e.a.r.n.ing" (emphasis in original).

"To orient oneself" means to look to the East. I have never heard anyone suggest a need to get "occidented," possibly because the West suffers from an anti-environmental pathology attributable to a dualistic-exploitive (non-"stewardship") interpretation of the word "dominion" in Genesis 1:26.

"The word "psyche," according to Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Second College Edition, 1970), means, in psychiatry, "the mind considered as a subjectively perceived, functional entity, based ultimately upon physical process but with complex processes of its own: it governs the total organism and its interaction with the environment" (emphasis added).

All of which, hopefully, "explains" why I invented, for the private publication of a non-linear book zentitled Zentences! in 1972 (three years before starting to create The Garden of Eden), a literary device zentitled "Headquarters Intergalactic Psychic Police" of the Seventh Planet, Uranus. H.I.P.P. is defired as "the antithesis of the Thought Police" (as found in George Orwell's 1984 and in The New Columbia Encyclopedia under "Secret Police").





Bruce McM. Wright, J.

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
COUNTY OF NEW YORK

index No. 17310 - 1984  
APPLICATION FOR TEMPORARY STAY.  
TRIAL TERM, PART 20, July 31st, 1984.

DAVID WILKIE, a/k/a JOHN PETER ZENGER II, a/k/a ADAM PURPLE.  
Plaintiff

ANTHONY GLIEDMAN, Commissioner, Department of Housing  
Preservation and Development.  
ALEXANDER NACLERIO, Director of Housing, U.S. Department of  
Housing and Urban Development  
JOSEPH CHRISTIAN, Chairman of New York City Housing Authority.  
Defendants

BRUCE McM. WRIGHT, J.

Revealed as allegiant to a doctrine of enlightenment through meditation known as Zen, the plaintiff is nevertheless a feisty activist. Open and notorious in his adverse occupation of an otherwise abandoned building, plaintiff's biographical details remain his secret. We know more about the John Peter Zenger whose name plaintiff has adopted. The adoption of that name by one fancies meditation is an anomaly, in view of the free press activities of the original Zenger that resulted in his indictment for seditious libel and his consequent liberation through the genius of the ill-fated Alexander Hamilton, who glorified American history at a time when the country's purported Christian conscience was tainted by the shame of slavery.

As for the name Adam Purple, it seems to derive from the plaintiff's preference for that color in his clothing. As will be seen, he has become a latter-day urban Johnny Appleseed, seeking to heal slum wounds by an infusion of beauty that appeases the Roman Goddess of Flowers, but offends the majesty of municipal planners. Stated in terms of what Hogarth described as the "straight line of duty" in opposition to the "curved line of beauty," the defendants, according to the complaint, have combined to exterminate, destroy, raze and reduce to dust, a garden constructed over the years by Mr. Purple on property condemned and dedicated to the development of new low rent housing in an area that is an architectural ruin.

Public necessity, it is argued, and a greater good for a greater number of Lower East Side inhabitants, must take precedence over the continued existence of the floral beauty created by Mr. Purple that he calls The Garden of Eden. Both the abandoned building in which plaintiff lives at 184 Forsyth Street and The Garden of Eden are

threatened with imminent destruction through official demolition. The Garden has received wide-spread press attention as modern wonder for its symetry, its beauty and its anachronistic location.

Plaintiff, alarmed by the danger to his creation, has now come to court to seek an order enjoining the defendants from demolishing the building in which he lives and his Garden.

Prior to signing the temporary restraining order now in force, I notified the defendants of the application and held an impromptu hearing at which counsel for all defendants except federal officials appeared and presented arguments in extenso. The heart of plaintiff's contentions may be summarized as follows:

- I. If defendants contend that the City of New York owns 184 Forsyth Street, that ownership is a fiction.
- II. Alleged condemnation proceeding were illegal and meaningless, as Adam Purple was never the beneficiary of due process as the owner of the property.
- III. Adam Purple, by notorious and open adverse occupation of 184 Forsyth Street, became its owner by virtue of his adverse possession for ten years.
- IV. The City of New York advertised for bids that solicited possible developers of the property in dispute, at a time when the City did not own the property, either through in rem or condemnation proceedings, thus invalidating all subsequent condemnation or other proceedings.

Of course, if time stood still, condemnation proceedings could be commenced anew, with Adam Purple named as the owner-respondent in such proceedings, assuming, arguendo, that recognition is given his status as an adverse possession owner. In such proceedings, the only real issue is the amount the sovereign must pay an owner for foreclosing the latter's title and vesting it in the City.

The emergency here, however, as described by the City, is that long scheduled development will be in jeopardy, unless, by a certain date, demolition is completed and the development is underway. It is the federal grant of funds that may be lost, unless razing proceeds apace.

Mr. Purple's young lawyer, aided and assisted by a community activist and her statistics, has made an eloquent and emotional appeal for the temporary restraining order and, of course, he would love to see such an order ripen into a full-blown injunction. He argues with great passion that The Garden of Eden is an artistic landmark, nay, an original and impossible-to-duplicate work of art. Both he and Mr. Purple have rejected offers to relocate The Garden and its artist, contending that Mr. Purple and his creation are protected under The

Artists Authorship Act found in the General Business Law. Pointed to is a grant by the City itself of an artist's certification to Mr. Purple. The impending destruction of The Garden, plaintiff says, will deface, alter, mutilate and/or modify the work of art The Garden is, all in violation of The Artists Authorship Act.

The chronological history of this Lower East Side project shows that every detail has been fastidiously developed, starting in July, 1980, more than four years ago. The proposal to build new housing for low and middle-income families in the area has recieved the support of the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council; the site has been approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Community Board No. 3. All of these plans fall under the Uniform Land Use Review Procedures (S197-c, New York City Charter). In the tradition of bureaucratic jargon, that title has been reduced to the acronym "ULURP."

Defendants admit that title to the affected property did not vest in it until February, 1984; nor is it contested that bids were sought long before that date and in May, 1982, even before the condemnation proceeding was begun. However, the City takes the position that the property is one of those long abandoned by prior fee owners and eventually taken in rem by the City.

In any event, the matter bulks as one large in importance to all sides. Sir Thomas Browne (1605 - 1682), may have unwittingly touched the exposed nerve of the present confrontation in his Urn Burial, where he wrote that:

"Time which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these minor monuments."

And before that, in his The Garden of Cyrus, He spoke of the "sweetest delight of gardens:" the comforts they afford; their "delectable odours;" and how they raised up the ghost of a rose." But, he also warned th;at "All things began in order, so shal they end." Nevertheless, he believed that they would begin again, "according to the ordainer of order and the mystical mathmatics of the city of heaven. The serpent in plaintiff's Garden is the magisterial City, with its laws and ordinances of destruction and rebirth and its spoken obligation to the more numerous commonweal, as opposed to the singular genius of Mr. Purple. William Hazlitt, speaking On Taste, tells us, from his 18th century wisdom and the rampant clash of the Industrial Revolution with Renaissance values, that "Rules and models destroy genius and art." Art, it seems, stops short "in the cultivated court," according to Sullivan's lyricist, Gilbert, in their musical jest named for a quality not possessed by the defendants, Patience.

Creative art, Wordsworth comments in his Miscellaneous Sonnets, "Demands the service of a mind and heart." The City and The National

sovereign, plaintiff complains, which to exercise what one of Pope's heroic couplets refers to as "the last and greatest art, the art to blot" while blotting out plaintiff's creation. Plaintiff is intransigent on the question of rising again, with his flora, like a herbaceous pheonix rising from the dead leaves of his garden's destruction. Unlike the pheonix, it seems unlikely that he will live five hundred years, nor will he willingly fling himself upon some municipal pyre to repeat the mythological bird's legend, by accepting the offer of another site for his gardening.

Unable to, or unwilling, to erase the graffiti that is defined as a crime, the ministers of the mighty State have elected to root out the art that is as open and notorious as plaintiff claims his adverse use of the land has been. Plaintiff now must be moved to public weeping that:

"Old times were changed, old manners gone; (Philistines now rule the) throne; The bigots of the iron time (now call) his harmless art a crime."

Although that tampered with excerpt from Sir Walter Scott's The Lay Of The Last Minstrel, is not precisely as the poet wrote it, it somehow fits the melancholy mood of the plaintiff's cause and his doomed thesis here. He would, perhaps, agree that "The art of our necessities is strange" (King Lear), for art should be as "Lawful as eating" (The Winter's Tale). With little now to rejoice about, plaintiff can relish the concept that art will survive the crass moguls of municipal policy, even as his tiniest coins survive Tiberius.

Assuming, arguendo, that adverse possession can be shown, and that may be doubtful, such must be established by clear and convincing proof, as a hornbook rule. But something more than the mere continuous, open, notorious, hostile and adverse occupancy and use of property is necessary.

"To be sure, there are additional statutory requirements as well, whether the possession is under written instrument (Real Property Actions and Proceeding Law, SS511, 512) or under claim of title not written (SS521, 522)."

(Brand v. Prince, 35 N. Y. 2d 634, 636.)

Whether that something more as a condition precedent to the ripening of adverse possession has been satisfied, is missing from the plaintiff's paper. It is not clear just what particular sites the plaintiff claims. On page 2 of his moving affidavit, plaintiff speaks of having been " -continuously working on the land, and as new and contiguous lots became open because of the demolition of surrounding buildings, I continued to enlarge "The Garden of Eden."

This is far too vague a reference upon which to base wholesale adverse possession. It leaves critical datas open to guesswork and speculation.

In addition, the damage plaintiff claims to be the victim of is not of the irreparable kind that invites the intervention of equity. If he owns the property, condemnation proceedings would eventually disseize him in any event. In condemnation proceedings, the issue is not will they succeed but only how much money should be paid to the owner. Thus, damages are measurable in terms of dollars and not in terms of some inequitable deprivation. The likelihood of ultimate success on the part of the plaintiff is thus non-existent.

The opposing papers demonstrate that as long ago as 1978. in rem proceeding concluded in a judgment of foreclosure in May of that year. These proceedings were advertised, as required, and the last known owners of record of the properties here at issue, were served by mail. The proceeding went forward by default. It seems inconceivable that Adam Purple, with his legions of community activists and their emotional identification with his romantic ambitions, were ignorant of such proceedings, proceedings that went forward during the same time that Mr. Purple was allegedly accumulating his years of adverse occupancy. That was the time for him to come forward and declare his ownership. To have remained silent under such circumstances is the equivalent of being furtive and obscurantist, to say the least.

Coming forward at this tardy time, after the Lower East Side I Urban Renewal Plan has ripened into formal foreclosure and condemnation judgments, triggers the force of equity against plaintiff. Private necessity must now yield to the greater ethic of the public commonweal and its more numerous beneficiaries.

The City does not come off as a knight in shining armor, however. One of its own exhibit was a 1983 notice sent to "John Peter Zenger, III," the text of which appears to recognize Mr. Wilkie-Zenger-Purple as a tenant of 184 Forsyth Street. The notice demands "rent" from July, 1980 to December, 1983. If plaintiff asserted rights of ownership, then was the time to come forward and defy the City's claim. The City, on the other hand, should have commenced eviction proceedings to collect the rent it alleged was due. That would have eliminated the necessity for the present vexatious confrontation. Obviously, the City can still commence a non-payment eviction proceeding although perhaps not for all of the arrears it has allowed to accumulate.

And so, this dispute is really not about the preservation of art at all, except in a miserordiam sense. Finally, the plaintiff has been unable to demonstrate in his papers that he will succeed in the end and that kind of showing is a prerequisite to carrying the day for temporary injunctive relief. There is no need to cite a catalogue of cases on that traditional rule.

In addition, the allocation comes on the brink of the eleventh hour. Here, as in Matter of Young v. Wagner, 13 N. Y. 2d 934, where the Court of Appeals affirmed 19 App. Div. 2d 825, "-because of delay in bringing" a mandamus proceeding.

For the foregoing reasons, although I signed the order to show cause containing a temporary restraint, that temporary restraint is now vacated and set at naught and the application is denied. The foregoing constitutes both the decision and the order of the court.

August 3, 1984

J. S. C.

Bruce McM. Wright, J.







Olive Bridget Brown



### Twenty Years Hence

I have gone down to the old quarter, where once there grew amidst demolished tenements a Garden. A grand circular Garden rising from debris, from one man's ten-year struggle. I heard some twenty years ago the Garden was itself destroyed to make way for a public housing project. And I suppose that this must be what I now see in the old quarter where the Garden once grew.

It's August. Dusty, sweating children run in the streets for there is no other place to play. The only green in sight is a straggling row of gigantic dumpsters with garbage tumbling out and strewn about. The stench of decay pervades the air. The paint is peeling, the bricks are falling, the narrow sidewalks cracking.

And I wonder about a "housing solution" that destroyed that growing Garden. I wonder about a great civilization that has forsaken belief in the quality of life. I wonder why the housing and Garden were not or could not have been in some way combined. And, I wonder about Architecture.

Olive Bridget Brown  
New York City  
September 1984



Patricia C. Phillips

Gardens have always been an expression of a conception of life and culture. In spite of the varied contexts and circumstances of generation, memorable gardens sustain a tension between artifice and nature, and private aspiration and public vision, such that contrasts, while inherent, are not always apparent. Whether gardens are, or can be, public art is a query which must consider intention, communication, context and perception. The process of creating and maintaining a garden can be a comprehensive involvement of aesthetic, science, design, planning, hope, fortitude. The possibilities for invention and the potential for enchantment are incentives which feed a commitment that must persist throughout the seasons and often for many years. When people cease to work in the garden, the garden ceases to be.

It is impossible to understand the capacity of gardens as public art without determining a definition of public art. The cause of public art has become a facile and fashionable rallying point which is diminished in significance by a loss of scrutiny. In a city where development is no longer possible without an accompanying sacrifice of older buildings or open space, and where the installation of public art becomes increasingly a corporate exercise, of art in cities must be clearly focused. Adam Purple's Garden of Eden in the Lower East Side of Manhattan is a poignant example of how divergent visions for a city can intersect and either conflict, compete or co-exist. The Garden of Eden has become public art through time and process and is worthy of whatever energies are required to protect and preserve it. But why it is art, and more specifically public art, deserves an analysis of forces and ideas. Cities are saturated by public art by proclamation rather than realization.

Adam Purple considers himself the artist-in-residence at the site of the 15,000 square foot garden of his painstaking creation. The fact that the garden is now perceived by both its creator and a wide constituency as art, and worthy of preservation, is one of the most distinctive and dynamic characteristics of working in a public setting to realize a private vision. The constant exchange of creative output, conceptual invasion and unpredictable perception can foster a climate for art. In Purple's case, what began as a strong desire to improve the painful and disturbing realities of his immediate environment, has been transformed into a public art form that is communicative, compelling and universal. Art is always a compliance between the creator/conceptualist and viewer/participant, and it is the intensity of this dialogue, the level and breath of engagement, and the accessibility of the art form which make it public.

The Garden of Eden has become public art in spite of itself. Purple's private act of faith and revolt has become a public message by virtue of its eloquence and the creative recycling of city refuse, resources, systems and ideas. Because of where it grows, the way it was created, and the energies required to maintain it, The Garden of Eden is also the quintessential example of process art. It captivates the

imagination of many as it evolves toward an undividable future. It needs constant human intervention or else it can become yet another overgrown city lot. Gardening is unselfconsciously a process without a conjured rationale of aesthetics. A garden is always in a state of growth or demise.

Manhattan's Lower East Side is a neighborhood of neglect which is usually skillfully and selectively ignored in the collective images of New York City. Situated several blocks east of SoHo, it is a compulsive reminder of the collusion of geography, avarice, vision, and frustration which shapes every neighborhood's destiny and character. There are areas around The Garden of Eden which look like the ghastly photographs of Dresden or Frankfurt taken after World War II. Between the ravages of the wrecking ball and the horrors of economic neglect, many blocks stand in ghostly ruins. These carcasses of buildings are evidence of the vulnerability of life and hope in the wake of economic fluctuations, declining employment, the demise of city services and the failures of long-range planning. Like gardens, neighborhoods and cities falter and fail with neglect.

This is the context that Adam Purple has chosen, or been condemned, to work within. With eyes that were unbelieving and a will that is indefatigable, he has created the 20th century Garden of Eden in the lifeless landscape of rubble and garbage behind his home on Forsyth Street. He has found inspiration in despair, like many artists. The parallels and comparisons are circumscribed, yet Purple's garden shares a common affinity with the work of the alte Robert Smithson. Smithson's last works dealt with reclamation of ruined landscapes. His concepts boldly highlighted the balance of art and life, life and death, and reinstituted the belief that art is a process of social and political involvement. Smithson believed that art could have content that referred to context; he believed that art was a resource that could forge new connections and scenarios for activity in the world. He sought out the detritus of contemporary civilization and looked to the wastelands brought about by unplanned strip mining and other exploitive industries that had ravaged the land, leaving scenes of catastrophe behind. The scale in which he worked was as aggressive as the scope of the atrocities.

Purple shares with Smithson and other environmental artists this mission to resurrect and right devastation. Smithson looked to industrial scars and geological peculiarities in virtually uninhabited landscape; Purple has had to look simply to his own backyard and the urgency of this desperate situation. Although Smithson worked at a massive scale, his productions were contained and discrete. The Garden of Eden is less monumental yet Purple's motivating concept is vast; the garden is meant to expand to one-half the size of the earth. Smithson's work always joined ideas from art, metaphysics and social theory from an intellectual and objective vantage point. Purple also deals with a multiplicity of ideas and influences, but from a position which is subjective, emotional and impassioned. Purple wants to help

rescue the world from self-destruction and his efforts in the garden have become a resonant symbol. Smithsonian consciously created symbols to coax others to action and understanding. Both men saw that there was the potential and the responsibility for art to emerge from confrontation in the world, and that creation cannot be a hermetic process based solely on introspection.

Purple's vision for The Garden of Eden co-inhabits the realities of the present and speculations for the future. His concept far exceeds the dimensions of the Lower East Side site. The Garden is composed of a series of concentric rings which issue from a central yin/yang mandala drawn three-dimensionally with pure vegetation. The rings are paths laid in bricks placed in a running bond that races around the central symbol and unifying idea of The Garden. Short radials connect the circular paths which increase in circumference as well as width. Between these rings of brick are planting beds of soil, literally manufactured by Purple, where vegetables, flowers and herbs flourish. The hard-edge rings give order to the Garden; they pull toward the center and provide a formula for expansion.\* As in all wonderful gardens throughout history, the relationship of nature and culture is fraught with contrast and tension. Nature must be kept at bay and domesticated, yet allowed the capacity for abundance; growth must be conscientiously coaxed and then controlled just as tenaciously. There is both strength and fragility in the garden. Gardens can virtually last forever with care or be reclaimed by nature and other forces with neglect -- or, in the case of Purple's garden, can be buried under by irreconcilable differences.

Purple has realized his vision for the garden patiently, primitively and purposefully. His labor has been a response to a society seemingly gone mad, and his activity of healing and communication over the past ten years has flourished through his arduous and unilateral efforts. The contemporary world operates with a system of guiding distortions and the most obvious is the cognition of time. We all share an accelerated and condensed time horizon which suggests that all conclusions should follow beginnings somewhat rapidly and routinely. Purple's ten-year commitment to an idea with no possibility of conclusive realization seems of another age. His investments thus far, and projects for the future, give the Garden of Eden a signature of endurance within a context that imminently threatens its perpetuity.

If Purple owned several lush acres in upstate New York and decided to create a contemporary Garden of Eden his efforts would be a curiosity to cherish rather than an escalating and problematic controversy. This is, of course, conjecture to make a point. The Garden of Eden was cultivated by the forces of economic injustice and senseless waste, and the search for hope in a neighborhood of despair. Because of its location, it is an enduring and unforgettable condemnation of



society's misapprehensions. Purple's capacity for imagination within devastation is haunting. His persistence and stamina have been periodically rejuvenated by anger and civil disobedience directed toward human organizations satisfying short-term objectives. The Garden of Eden has set roots on land that is both privately and publicly owned. Purple is a squatter in the building where he lives and does not discretely cower from officialdom. Instead, he has defiantly expressed his homeless condition on a piece of land that he has claimed through creative activity and perpetual care. As an expression of domain, his work in the Garden of Eden sends an alternative message about possession and the ideal of home and community; ownership and entitlement are more complex than the routine exchange of money, titles and deeds. The garden is a conspicuous phenomenon; it is as poignant, disturbing, communicative and ultimately more enduring than most public demonstrations of unrest and revolution. Subversion is a public activity and Purple's garden, while a tranquil oasis that restores and refreshes, is fundamentally subversive because of where it is, and for the issues, conflicts and questions its existence and destiny materialize.

The appearance of unplanned and fortuitous urban gardens in vacant lots is an ironic inversion of technology and of the pastoral ideal in America. In the 19th century, the Garden was a symbol of the struggle to stoke the fires of robust industry. Yet the machines slowly and inevitably invaded the garden of pastoral optimism and protectionism. In the 1st quarter of the 20th century, the Lower East Side of Manhattan island was a loud and eloquent testament to greed, progress and planning gone awry to create a new technological wilderness of urban blight. The garden now has an opportunity for retaliation. Purple single-handedly cannot keep the forces of urban development just and optimistic; the landscape shaped by money and policy has reached an indeterminate scale. Yet the Garden of Eden is a persuasive example of invasion and improvisation in a city that stifles outlets for the uncalculated and unendorsed, as well as many avenues for rejuvenation. His garden makes an incursion on the hard edges and harsh realities of desperation and reminds us all that great civilizations survive on the edge, and can be reclaimed by natural phenomena when human misconceptions falter and fail. The Garden of Eden is a reinterpretation of pastoralism to balance the sobering weight of folly.

It is ironic that New York, like so many American cities, exerts considerable resources to generate and maintain programs to support transitional and permanent public art. The construction of public art has become a politicized journey through endless committees. Through good fortune and Adam Purple's belief that a garden can emerge from desecration, New York has been given an environmental art form that engages people and issues well beyond the edges of the Lower East Side. The collective agencies which commission and place public art throughout the city may be missing an opportunity to help to preserve a unique manifestation of public art. Public art is an arrangement of

aesthetic intention in conjunction with reception; this complex process cannot be dictated or prescribed but unfolds more subtly and often surprisingly.

The Garden of Eden is a political and symbolic place for a community and the city. To not find a way to sustain this lush art form of incalculable promise is the ultimate failure of faith and imagination. Complex and urgent needs--low-income housing, public art and open space--can be mutually realized and enhanced through cooperative

orientation that transcends inflexible positions and myopic visions. Throughout history the garden has been a forum for the convergence of natural forces, human conception and activity. The garden is a metaphor for the suspension of conflict through the acceptance of contrast. This metaphor merits extension and existence in Purple's struggling neighborhood. This passionate process art of gardening deserves a continued opportunity to flourish rather than a recessed place in our collective memory.





Lucy R. Lippard

Public art in any form requires extraordinary patience and persistence. Audience is the least of the problems. Red tape and officialdom are the most. Adam Purple (John Peter Zenger II), a self-described Zen/Taoist/anarchist, has been locked in combat with the New York City Housing Authority since 1982, when the NYCHA announced its intention to develop "lower-income" housing on the site of his The Garden of Eden, constructed independently in 1974 on five vacant lots on Eldridge Street.

Purple's persistence has become as legendary as the garden itself. No hokey, down-home intervention into urban decay, The Garden of Eden is exquisitely designed and planted, with the formal grandeur of French or Japanese prototypes. A maze-like series of stone concentric circles (made of immense granite slabs hauled from local demolition sites) are broken by paths in mathematical progression and centered on a yin/yang symbol. The garden offers a cosmic display of flowers, vegetables, even some rare trees which grew fortuitously from seeds in the horse manure its creator bicycled down from Central Park.

The theoretical plan is that the garden continue to expand mathematically until "you can see it from a satellite." If Purple sometimes plays God rather than Adam, he is to some extent entitled: "It takes Mother Nature 500 years to create one inch of topsoil; on that basis The Garden of Eden represents 2,000 to 3,000 years of evolution." Purple also sees himself as a "mirror-image Prometheus," bringing fresh water to put out the urban fires.

According to his associate, Sheyla Baykal, the City's plan calls for "the demolition of 12 buildings, 11 of them privately owned, displacement of 13 commercial tenants with relocation indicated for only 3, and relocation of 32 residential tenants." Residents are also bitter about the "lower-income" designation, which demands annual income beginning at \$27,000--"a lot more than any of us make," said neighbor Una Copley to the Daily News (July 17, 1984). Despite endless negotiations, hearings and press, the City has yet to reveal why, in a community blessed with all too many vacant lots, housing must be built on top of the area's sole beauty spot. Purple's lawyer has come up with a number of good arguments, among them an old English edict that makes Purple commonlaw owner of the land because he spent ten years improving it. His forces have succeeded in temporarily halting demolition around the garden, which remains intact at this writing.

A significant rescue mission is also being mounted by the Storefront for Art & Architecture, in September. Directors Kyong Park and Glen Weiss have invited architects from all over the world to design alternative projects that include The Garden. Their own proposal looks eminently reasonable, providing the same residential space plus the ready made public art, and saving a building at 53 Stanton Street that would be better rehabed than removed. Architectural exhibitions tend to be rather dry and heavy on detail, revealing little to the lay

person about the experience of the spaces they describe. This show should be an exception because one can take the ten-minute walk from gallery to garden (and back), visualizing change from a base in reality.

The garden's message is pretty metaphysical, couched in Adam's appropriately purple prose. (Zenger is a sort of Mary Daly of "zenvironmentalism", given to integralist puns like "Huwomanimal", the U.S. of Omerica", and "government ignoranuses.") Whatever the subtleties, the place itself speaks loud and clear for harmonious form in the midst of officially sanctioned chaos; caring work in an uncared for space; growing things in the midst of threatened death and decay....Near The Garden of Eden there is a graffiti that has a Purplish ring to it: "The Task of the Enlightened is to restore, with the tools of Creativity, what the Hateful have destroyed with the Weapons of Oppression."

Lucy R. Lippard, Excerpted from The Village Voice  
Publication date in September





Richard Plunz

Adam Purple

vistas well-defined and integrated with the buildings. The second, Williamsburg Houses, was a series of buildings which tended to float in a sea of green. Ironically, as this aesthetic imperative for nature intensified, it also became more and more dissociated from both buildings; and use by people, especially with the park, has been one of the staple criticisms of that era and ideology in social housing.

Ironically Chrystie-Forsyth Streets, once the controversial location of a vast tower project proposal publicized in 1931, is now the site of a controversial tiny garden. Today, constraints on the design of housing are different than those of a few decades ago and in general, many aspects of the present situation would seem to be sympathetic to The Garden of Eden. Massive public housing projects are no longer built, atrophied by both political and economic constraints.

The incessant reductions of the last 15 years in direct government subsidy of social housing has been combined with a greater private role in production. From the side of architectural theory, 1960's social criticism of the "Tower-in-the-park", has led to other design ideologies. Naturalism in housing has retreated from park to guerilla patch. And in fact scores of vacant lots throughout New York have been expropriated as neighborhood gardens; sometimes an accommodation from some temporary patron, but more often an ignored enterprise in that the neighborhood situation is officially deemed hopeless anyway. On what can such initiatives be opposed? Can any one afford to be against the improvement of New York in this way?

The guerrilla patch is a "Victory Garden" with an edge, and not exactly like the predecessors of the First and Second World Wars--"victorious" for the kind of assertion which it represents, and in this sense threatening in spite of miniscule scale. Can the Lower East Side afford to discard the power of this assertion? Is not the aesthetic initiative alone worth the cause, as the Lower East Side becomes more and more populated by artists fleeing housing difficulties nearby. No one has argued that The Garden of Eden did not improve its content, that it has no aesthetic value, or that it can not be integrated within the configuration of the project proposed for the site. In relation to the evolution of housing in New York, the appearance of The Garden of Eden is timely circumstance. Its significance is underlined by the history of community design activism in the 1960's by the "green" movements, by the socio-political opposition to overscaled housing projects; and now, by the issue of gentrification in the East Village and the Lower East Side, and by the artist community which has become the inevitable staple in this process in New York City.

It has been observed that in New York "art is on the cutting edge of real estate," and it is at this level The Garden of Eden is an interesting incident. It is here that housing reform and nature meet this today, beginning with the threat of precedent to the development process in New York. At the bureaucratic level, the Garden of Eden

interjects a level of participation in decision making which was then lost. For example, the very effective then Neighborhood Development Program (NPD) was created by the Omnibus Housing Act of 1968, and dismantled by the Nixon Administration less than four years later.

The chic of today invades different values which are fully apparent in the art world. Bohemianism is far from the commercialism of the East Village gallery scene, which is smoothly paving the way for the young professionals who need the neighborhood. In Manhattan and elsewhere, this development process is nearly perfect, moving from neighborhood to neighborhood and penetration to the subconscious depths of City bureaucracy. In this frenzy, can the unsolicited and unpaid product of one person's divination survive? Or if it does survive and is protected, can it have any possible meaning beyond cynical usurption? Mr. Purple's garden stops us short.





Frederick Ted Castle

The spectacle of gardening, the domestic and urban form of agriculture, always gives me cheer and courage. No matter where in the world I find myself, when I see some beautiful plants, such as the climatis flowers I recently saw on a vine in Virginia or the leeks and artichokes I saw growing two years ago on the island of Torcello near Venice, or the purple sweet basil and white sweet williams in blossom that form the exquisite center of Adam's Garden a few blocks from my house here in New York, I feel renewed and rewarded. This simple pleasure does not require that I sniff, pick, buy, sell or eat the produce of these plants. The sight of tended plants, particularly when they are offering their (sexual) blossom, their (edible) fruits and their (seminal) seeds and roots to us, arouses a particular emotion in me that I imagine other people feel as well. I don't know what you call it, but I guess it's tenderness. It's analogous to the emotion expressed by motion picture audiences when a domestic animal, especially an infant animal, appears on the screen. Everybody in the theatre, it seems, would like to hug the creature, and they make a noise of exclamation. With plants, it's a little different--one tends to hide one's feelings a little more, but the feeling is there. For a number of years, I have tended, rather offhandedly, a large box of fast growing plants that I don't know by name. Last year I moved them to a new window and for the first time they blossomed! I regarded them in an entirely new manner. It appeared to me to be an expression--anthropomorphic or not--of gratitude. I'm sure that their intentions were else--but even the concept of the intentions of plants (or of gods) is anthropomorphic in the extreme. We don't know too much about other forms of life. We treat flowers as if they were objects created for our pleasure, rather than the explicitly sexual organs that they are from the point of view of the plant. Again and again, one marvels at the indispensability and ubiquity of bees. If you grow flowers on your roof in the city, when they blossom, bees visit, as if they were part of the flowers, but they aren't, they are part of another economy which has a strangely human rule: You can't eat unless you have honey, and honey can only be made from pollen and nectar and shit. People who claim to know a lot about plants and bees say that the beauty of the flowers is signaling system telling the bees where to pick up raw materials. From the point of view of the intentions of God, we would have to say that flowers also have the function of pleasing us; however irrelevant our pleasure may be to the life of the plant. Or is it? Since everything is interrelated, even simple emotions have their places.

Gardening is not something that I love to do. I tend my pet plants, who are very few although one is an individual called Plantita who I have had to re-pot three times in three years, and who expresses herself by raising and lowering her fronds (she is a dracena marginata, if you know what that is). At dinner parties I introduce her as The Boss. But I don't love gardening. During the Big War my father and I had a Victory Garden where I raised some potatoes, onions, tomatoes and corn. I didn't like weeding the garden, not because (as my father feared) I didn't like work, but because I was interested in the weeds as plants. But if we garden we come to learn



that some plants have to be weeded out or else they will kill the plants that feed and pleasure us, who are domesticated and accustomed to the special treatment that producers receive in every culture.

Gardening is a paradigm, a model, for all culture. It is a process of selection--this plant, but not that. Adam refers to many of the trees in his garden as "volunteers". He means he didn't start them, they were "weeds". I'm sure he has eliminated thousands of potential volunteer trees in favor of rose bushes and cucumber vines over the years without a second thought. Real gardeners save some seeds from the best plants to propagate the species, and often end by raising their own, slightly unique, varieties of whatever they're growing. Then they start a seed company! One of the fetching and also off-putting aspects of gardening is its inherent modesty. What are you doing in life? Oh, just tending my garden. How interesting! Gardening involves one with plants and with the earth and with insects and with water and the sun. It does not involve one very much in relations with other people. Fortunately you can eat the products of your labor (an unusual outcome in most walks of life) and you get quite a bit of exercise getting the earth ready and doing ancillary things that, although perhaps unnecessary, making a garden the work of art that it is. I asked Adam where he got the stone with which he has built dry stone fences that define his garden in the serpentine formation so dear to Thomas Jefferson and other classical designers. He said, "I just picked them up." The bricks and pebbles with which Adam has paved the paths of his garden are also found. No architects, no matter how rich his client, could have ordered more appropriate or even more elegant materials. The garden is not paved in "rubble". It is a clearly conceived, well-excuted plan which like several examples of prehistoric art (e.g., the lines on the Nazca in Peru), is easier to appreciate from the air. This reminds one of some modern architecture too. But that just means that the whole plan is clear from the air. All gardens that I have ever seen can only be Experienced in person, on foot, or sitting there in the shade of a building or tree.

Sitting in Adam's Garden, in the shade of some young fruit trees, a coppice that functions as his office as well, you hardly see the concentric form of the paths and the beds of all the different vegetables and flowers. (Like English gardeners, Adam mixes the species of flowers in the same beds but restricts each vegetable bed to one species, unlike Italian gardeners who will mix flowering plants, vegetables and fruits in the same beds.) You mainly see a beautiful tree which is not in the center of the garden but which forms a center piece (as the North Pole is not really at the North) and which is one you don't see every day (called Paulownia, I was told) which they also have some of in Central Park where Adam used to collect horseshit for fertilizer and which grows in China and blossoms very spectacularly when it does and performs shade duty all summer long. Then I notice (at this season--I have seen the garden all seasons many times for ten years) the purple basil and the sweet william awash in white specks of flowers. There are a few rosebushes

in this center circle too. In the several photographs that have been shot from the air or from high buildings adjoining, it is surprisingly clear that this center forms the famous yin-yang symbol of Zen Buddhism--the rose bushes perform the function of the "dots" of yang in the field of yin and vice versa. This sign is one of the best symbols of the total interrelatedness of everything on earth and in heaven that people have ever devised; the other one is the circle. At regular intervals, the beds of the garden are laid in circles around this inner circle at the center of the garden. The fact that the paths are circular is very apparent to the visitor. Don't forget that all the paths are even provided with curbs of metal or brick, making the demarcation as clear as possible. You have to walk in circles. There are probably classical circular gardens (although I have never visited one myself) but I bet that, like Paris and Washington, the circles are intersected by straight lines that get you right to the centers of the action. Not in Adam's Garden! There is no straight path to the center. You have to step around several different beds of plants to get there. No doubt this plan has some utility such as getting from one bed to the next bed with speed, but I find it interesting in itself, sort of as a goal-delaying device. (The famous barricades of 19th Century Revolutionary Paris were erected precisely to interrupt access to the centers.) You cannot wander by this garden, it is continuously getting in your way. And this asymmetry also has the secret of slightly obscuring the perfection of the layout. You don't get any straight alleys even though the thing is perfectly rational. Another thing that adds to the effect of being in nature while experiencing nothing but culture is the placement of the plants themselves, which, while it makes sense, doesn't do so in a programmatic order. There are several beds of corn, tall at this season, but they are not at the four corners of the compass. The flowers are mostly near the center. The corn is near or at the periphery.

But where is the end of the garden? The circles stop short at the buildings and the foundations of former buildings and the sinuous walls of the garden as a whole. There is an area nearly as large that remains vacant and cleared to the south; and, to the west, buildings are being destroyed as I write. Adam has not expanded his garden. The garden is not a beautiful farm, it is a garden; a unique creation of a unique person doing something which, while we share something of the impetus and appreciate the service, nobody else could do. In short, the garden is complete as a work of art as well as as a garden. Possibly other garden works could be created by Adam or by others on other plots of land near Forsyth Street, or far away, and from what I know of our species, I am sure that we will make other garden if we can. But the fact remains that Adam's Garden is a wonderful creation rising out of the ground in New York City expressing the vision and determination of one man and of all humanity. Like all great art, the garden is unique and universal; unlike commercial art, it has to be where it is. Adam himself told me that he has a gut feeling that the garden will persist, no matter what the politics of culture. And I think so too.



Adam Purple above The Garden of Eden.

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